



STATE OF WASHINGTON

**VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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Meeting Minutes  
July 6, 2006  
Yakima, Washington

**PRESENT:**

Bill Schrier, Chair  
Dick Whipple, Vice-Chair  
Phil Ruhmshottel, Marine Corps League  
Lloyd Burroughs, NABVETS  
Frank Cordero, Native American Veterans  
Barry Pfundt, AMVETS  
Dennis Primoli, At Large  
Michele Colpaert, DAV  
Roy Compton, AX-POWs  
Rupert Markham, WSH  
Bob Harcum, MOPH  
Dr. Les Burger, Advisor  
First Gentleman, Mike Gregoire  
Deryl McCarty, MOAA  
John Lee, WDVA Director  
April Harris, Executive Assistant

**EXCUSED:**

Oria Berndt, Advisor  
Chuck Karcewski, PVA  
Bob Westphal, Advisor  
Dick Kirk, Advisor  
Dan Gogerty, VLC  
George Edmundson, VVA

**ABSENT:**

Julie Mock, Advisor  
Richard Marin, At Large  
Mary Jo Cahill, Red Cross

**CALL TO ORDER**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**INVOCATION**

**WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND HOUSEKEEPING**

**MINUTES:**

**Phil Ruhmshottel motioned to have the minutes accepted as written**

**Second by Bob Harcum**  
**Unanimous approval**

RETURNEES' INFORMATION – Tom Riggs

The National Guard at Camp Murray, in conjunction with the WDVA and other partners, is providing assistance and information to returnees from OIF/OEF and ONE. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed to confirm the support of the entities in working together to ensure these new veterans are aware of, and have access to information regarding their benefits and entitlements, assistance with employment or housing and emergency financial assistance. One of the ways this is accomplished is through regularly scheduled Family Activity Days throughout the state.

Mr. Riggs was asked if we have inroads to Military One Source. The answer was no, but information about the program is given returnees. This will most likely be a topic at the federal VA's Commission for Disability Benefits public meeting this month.

Mr. Riggs was invited to talk to the Yakama Nation and inform them of what is available.

A member of the Yakama Nation and a veteran commended the committee for helping new veterans.

Families don't turn out for FADs. Suggestions were made to have a BBQ, conduct them in the middle of a spouse's deployment to prepare the family, and to involve the auxiliaries.

WASHINGTON VETERANS HOME ACTIVITY – Jon Clontz

Superintendent of the Washington Veterans Home, at Retsil, provided an update of the planned activity for the home. Included was the start up of a transition program in Building 9. This program is a sedgway for veterans to transition back into the community after receiving a variety of services, including additional training for employment.

A new park, called Heritage Park, is planned after Buildings 6 and 7 are demolished. These buildings are seriously outdated and in need of expensive repairs. The residents from these buildings will move to other locations at the home. The park will have a view of the sound, and hopefully, will be home to a Native American totem pole being created by the Lummi Nation to honor veterans.

Some residents will move to a wing in the new 240-bed facility. In addition, a new geropsych program will be implemented in Building 10. There is an increasing

need for appropriate housing for veterans who suffer from various types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. Dr. Burger will provide the name of a VA doctor, Sharon Falsgraph, who heads the Alzheimer's unit at American Lake.

#### LUMMI TOTEM POLE – Frank Cordero

Frank Cordero provided additional information about the totem poles the Lummi Master Carver, Juel James, is creating. Already several have been made in honor of those who fell on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Frank also explained about praying at the poles and the significance of the traveling tour the pole takes in which those who visit it give it their prayers and infuse the pole with human significance.

Handouts were provided showing the next totem pole design and history around the healing poles.

Frank will take the lead in organizing communities for the totem pole to visits. He asked the VAAC for support and possibly an award from the Emblem Fund. April will send the forms to Frank.

Bill Schrier asked for any dissention among the committee in supporting this effort. There was none and a commitment was made to support the totem pole initiative.

#### WDVA STRATEGIC PLAN – John Lee

Each of the VAAC members was provided with CDs containing the agency's strategic plan for 2007 – 2011. At the previous meeting, the VAAC advised the agency on what they find important for the agency to focus on.

Copies were also sent to the members of the Veteran and Military Affairs Committee along with a letter from John Lee. Mr. Lee stated we need to do a better job of welcoming home our returnees than we did with the Vietnam Era veterans. He thanked the Governor and the First Gentleman for their support and the funding provided in the Supplemental Budget.

Specifically addressed in the Strategic Plan are Homelessness and the Eastern Washington Cemetery, which will be located in Spokane. The county commissioners are interested in donating land near Willow Lake. Senator Patty Murray is being briefed today. It will open on Veterans' Day 2008. Armed Forces license plate money will help to cover the cost of maintenance.

Millions of dollars are being spent on the homeless around the country. It is important to partner and not duplicate services. WDVA will look at the homeless in a different way. The Building 9 project at Retsil is part of this. Mr. Lee said it is time to stop talking about homelessness and do something about it.

The Veterans Innovations Program (VIP) is now in place with \$2 million specifically targeted at those who served in the Global War on Terrorism. The board plans to get a job for every returnee who finds themselves unemployed. \$1 million will be used for emergency needs.

The strategic plan can be viewed at [www.dva.wa.gov](http://www.dva.wa.gov).

#### CBOC – Dr. Burger

Federal VA is looking at replacing the nursing home in Walla Walla. April will distribute a report to the VAAC from Dr. Burger. This topic will be added to the agenda for September's VAAC meeting. Will this be a funding issue?

#### HEALTH RECORDS – Dr. Burger

Health records are separate when you see a provider in the community and also see a VA doctor. You should get a hardcopy of the records and bring in to the VA to ensure records are complete. If they aren't comparable, that is a concern.

#### DISABILITY COMMISSION VISIT

The federal VA's Commission on Disability Benefits will hold a public meeting at which people may testify. This meeting is **July 20<sup>th</sup> from 7 to 9 p.m. at the La Quinta hotel in Tacoma**. The VAAC will testify along with WDVA and the service organizations.

#### VAAC OFFICER NOMINATIONS – Dennis Primoli

**The Nomination Committee chaired by Dennis Primoli proposed to the committee to retain the current Chair, Bill Schrier, and Vice-Chair, Dick Whipple, for another term. Lloyd Burroughs seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.**

#### FIRST GENTLEMAN, MIKE GREGOIRE

The First Gentleman told the committee about the many visits he's made the last couple of months concerning veterans. He thanked John Lee for his leadership.

#### GOOD OF THE ORDER

Why isn't there a Merchant Marine license plate? Each branch of service was required to gather 2000 signatures and the Merchant Marines did not meet that goal.

The question about how to display the POW/MIA flag was brought up again. The information can be found on WDVA's website: [www.dva.wa.gov](http://www.dva.wa.gov).

HUD has moved all Section VIII money from Pierce County to King County.

Steve Menard asked why the services of disabled veterans owned businesses are not being utilized. There are federal contracts, why not state? They should be a priority.

There will be a joint meeting of VAAC and Commanders' Call that will not be a regular VAAC meeting, but an opportunity to share information.

The Yakima Valley CVC will have their annual stand down on October 28<sup>th</sup> at Yakima Community College.

Michele Colpaert said she has had many questions lately about the state's benefits for disabled veterans. Can we add more? What do other state's offer? Bring your thoughts to the next meeting, please.

Barry Pfundt brought up the issue of disability pensions being included as income when it comes to student loans. The benefits are no different than the general public's.

Betty Gould invited everyone to Camp Chaparral from August 19<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and provided a handout with information which April will distribute to the VAAC.

Laveda Fry, Service Officer for the Colville Tribe, reported the many veterans she has come to her office and invited the First Gentleman to their Pow-wow.

Meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
April Harris